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JOHN'S THANKSGIVING.

BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

IN THE EVENING of Thanksgiving day John Ingfield, the blacksmith, sat in his elbow chair among those who had been keeping festive at his board. Being the central figure of the domestic circle, the fire threw its strongest light on his massive and sturdy frame, rendering his rough visage so that it looked like the head of an iron statue, all aglow from his own forge, and with its features rudely fashioned on his own anvil. At John Ingfield's right hand was an empty chair. The other places round the hearth were filled by the members of the family, who all sat quietly, while, with a semblance of fantastic merriment, their shadows of the group, was John Ingfield's son, who had been bred at college and was now a student of theology at Andover. There was also a daughter of

16, whom nobody could look at without thinking of a rosebud almost blossoming. The only other person at the fireside was Robert Moore, formerly an apprentice of the blacksmith, but now his journeyman, and who seemed more like an own son of John Ingfield than did the pale and slender student.

Only these four had kept New England's festival beneath that roof. The vacant chair at John Ingfield's right hand was in memory of his wife, whom death had snatched from him since the previous Thanksgiving. With a feeling that few would have looked for in his rough nature, the reared husband had himself set the chair in its place next his own, and often did his eye glance thitherward as if he deemed it possible that the cold grave might send back its tenant to the cheerful fireside, at least for that one evening. Thus did he cherish the grief that was dear to him. It was another grief which he would fain have torn from his heart, or, since that could never be, have buried it too deep for others to behold or for his own remembrance. Within the past year another member of his household had gone from him, but not to the grave. Yet they kept no vacant chair for her.

While John Ingfield and his family were sitting around the hearth, with the shadows dancing behind them on the wall, the outer door was opened and a light footstep came along the passage. The latch of the inner door was lifted by a familiar hand, and a young girl came in, wearing a cloak and hood, which she took off and laid on the table beneath the looking-glass. Then after gazing a moment at the clock, she approached and took the seat at John Ingfield's right hand, as if it had been reserved on purpose for her.

"Here I am at last, father," said she. "You ate your Thanksgiving dinner without me, but I have come back to spend the evening with you."

Yes, it was Prudence Ingfield. She wore the same neat and maidenly attire which she had been accustomed to put on when the household work was over for the day, and her hair was parted from her brow in the simple and modest fashion that became her best of all. If her cheek might otherwise have been pale, yet the glow of the fire suffused it with a healthful bloom. If she had spent the many months of her absence in quiet study and industry, yet they seemed to have left no traces on her gentle aspect. She could not have looked less altered had she merely stepped away from her father's fireside for half an hour, and returned while the blaze was quivering upward from the same brands that were burning at her departure. And to John Ingfield she was the very image of his buried wife, such as he remembered her on the first Thanksgiving which they had passed under their own roof. Therefore, though naturally a stern and rugged man, he could not speak unkindly to his sinful child, nor yet could he take her to his bosom.

"You are welcome home, Prudence," said he, glancing sideways at her, and his voice faltered. "Your mother would have rejoiced to see you, but she has been gone from us these four months."

"I know it, father. I know it," replied Prudence, quickly. "And yet, when I first came in, my eyes were dazzled by the firelight that seemed to be sitting in this very chair. By this time the other members of the family had begun to recover from their surprise and became sensible that it was no ghost from the grave nor vision of their vivid recollections, but Prudence her own self. Her brother was the next that greeted

her. He advanced and held out his hand, as if to embrace her, as a brother would, yet not tentatively like a brother, but with an old kindness, as if he were a child again, and speaking to a child of old.

After Prudence's father earnestly rejoiced that a mere mortal Providence had turned her steps homeward in time for me to bid you a last farewell. In a few weeks, sister, I am to go as a missionary to the far island of the Pacific. There is not one of these beloved faces that I shall ever hope to behold again on this earth. Oh, may I see all of them—yours and all—beyond the grave."

A shadow flitted across the girl's countenance.

"Heaven is very dark, brother," answered she, withdrawing her hand somewhat hastily from his grasp. "I cannot see your last parting by the light of this fire."

While this was passing the twin girl—the rosebud that had grown on the same stem with the eastward-bound missionary—stood gazing at her sister, long and toiling herself upon her bosom, so that the tears of their hearts might interweave again. At first she was restrained by mingled grief and shame, and by a dread that Prudence was too much changed to respond to her affection, or that her own purity would be felt as a reproach by the lost one. But, as she listened to the familiar voice, while the face grew more and more familiar, she forgot everything save that Prudence had come back. Springing forward, she would have clasped her in a warm embrace. At that very instant, however, Prudence started from her chair and held out both hands with a warning gesture.

"No, Mary, no, my sister," cried she. "do not touch me. Your bosom must not be pressed to mine."

Mary stood averted and still, for she felt that something darker than the raven was between Prudence and herself, though they seemed so near each other in the light of their father's hearth, where they had grown up together. Meanwhile Prudence threw her eyes around the room in search of one who had not yet bidden her welcome. He had withdrawn from his seat by the fireside and was standing behind the door with his face averted, so that his features could be discerned only by the flickering shadow of the profile upon the wall. But Prudence called to him in a cheerful and kindly tone.

"Come, Robert," said she, "won't you shake hands with your old friend?"

Robert held back for a moment, but affection at length overcame him, and he rushed toward Prudence, seized her hand and pressed it to his bosom. "There, there, Robert," said she, smiling sadly as she withdrew her hand, "you must not give me too warm a welcome."

And now, having exchanged greetings with each member of the family, Prudence again seated herself in the vacant chair at John Ingfield's right hand. She was naturally a girl of quick and tender sensibilities, gladness in her countenance, but with a bewitching pathos interlarded among her merriest words and deeds. It was remarked of her, too, that she had a faculty, even in childhood, of throwing her own feelings like a spell over her companions, such as she had been in the days of her innocence, so did she appear this evening. Her friends, in the surprise and bewilderment of her re-

turn, almost forgot that she had ever left them, or that she had forfeited any of her claims to their affection. In the morning, perhaps they might have looked at her with a tired eye, but by the Thanksgiving fireside they felt on y that their own Prudence had come back to them and were thankful. John Ingfield's rough visage brightened with the glow of his heart as it grew warm and merry within him, and he twice or thrice laughed till the room rang again, yet seemed startled by the echo of his own mirth. The grave young minister became as foolish as a schoolboy. Mary, too, the rosebud, forgot that her twin blossom had ever been torn from the stem and trampled in the dust. And as for Robert Moore, he gazed at Prudence with the bashful earnestness of love new born, while she, with sweet maiden coquetry, half smiled upon and half discouraged him.

In short, it was one of those intervals when sorrow vanishes in its own depth of shadow and joy starts forth in transitory brightness. When the clock struck, Prudence poured out her father's customary draught of herb tea, which she had been steeping by the fireside ever since twilight.

"God bless you, child!" said John Ingfield, as he took the cup from her hand. "You have made your old father happy again. But we miss your mother sadly, Prudence, sadly. It seems as if she ought to be here now."

"Now, father, or never," replied Prudence.

It was now the hour for domestic worship, but while the family were making preparations for their duty, they suddenly perceived that Prudence had put on her cloak and hood and was lifting the latch of the door.

"Prudence, Prudence, where are you going?" cried they all with one voice.

As Prudence passed out of the door she turned toward them and flung back her hand with a gesture of farewell, but her face was changed that they hardly recognized it. Sin and evil passions glowed through its comeliness and wrought a horrible deformity; a smile beamed in her eyes as a triumphant mockery at their surprise and grief.

"Daughter," cried John Ingfield, between wrath and sorrow, "stay and be your father's blessing, or take his curse with you!"

For an instant Prudence lingered and looked back into the firelight room, while her countenance wore almost the expression as if she was struggling with a fiend, who had power to seize his victim even within the hallowed precincts of her father's hearth. The fiend prevailed, and Prudence vanished into the outer darkness. When the family rushed to the door they could see nothing, but heard the sound of wheels rattling over the frozen ground.

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